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SUBJECT: NGO REPORTS CROATIAN SOCIETY GRADUALLY OPENING BUT WORK
REMAINS

¶1. Croatian NGO iDEMO (the Institute for Democracy) on November 2 marked the publication of its Society Openness Index 2006 at a well-attended public presentation in Zagreb. Based on research by sociologists and other experts, as well as public opinion surveys, the Index examines six areas of society: education, economy, media, rule of law, political processes, and minorities. The main (although not exclusive) criteria for measuring openness in society were levels of discrimination against citizens by the government and civil control of government institutions. Each of the six areas was marked on a scale of 1 to 100.

¶2. The survey rated the media as most open with 46 points, and politics the lowest with 31 points. Economy and education got 45 points each, rule of law 44 and minorities 43 points. The average openness index is 42.1, slightly higher than 40.8 last year when the index was measured for the first time. In addition to being the area of the lowest degree of openness, politics is less open this year than last, unlike all other five areas where openness improved. The survey included two separate case studies, a fairly high degree of openness toward war crime prosecutions, but a low level of openness toward sexual minorities (homosexuals). Overall, a growing number of respondents (55 percent, up from 47 percent last year) define an open society as one in which all issues are debated openly, and all citizens have equal opportunity.

¶3. COMMENT: A recently established NGO, iDEMO's stated goals are to advance democracy and develop public policy proposals. Its leadership and associated experts were formerly active in George Soros's Open Society Institute in Croatia, which first developed the index in 2005. Those who took part in the 2006 study represent the country's most respected experts in their fields. Former Science Minister Gvozden Flego was the keynote speaker at the event, which was given extensive coverage by the media, including national TV channels. Croatian citizens will increasingly look to homegrown organizations like iDEMO to monitor the health and openness of their democracy and present fresh ideas to policy-makers. END COMMENT

BRADTKE